

## opinion letters

### Lions no go in Show

THE Eaglehawk Lions Club regretfully advises it will not be participating in this year's Bendigo Agricultural Show.

The decision was made after the Bendigo Agricultural Show Society advised site fees would increase this year.

As a non-profit organisation, members need to ensure each event the club participates in is as viable as possible for it to raise funds for the community.

The club has participated in fundraising at the show every year since 1975.

We would like to sincerely thank members of the public who have regularly supported us and helped raise funds for the community each year.

We wish the society all the best for this year's show.

*Eaglehawk Lions Club*

### Smoking bans positive move

FROM early next year, smokers will be banned from lighting up at raised platforms at tram stops and uncovered train platforms across the state.

This is great news for the health of Victorians.

It's important to see that the state government is extending smoking bans to protect commuters from second hand smoke, with the added benefit of making smoking less visible to impressionable young people

In Greater Melbourne alone, an estimated 235,000 people catch the train or tram to work every

day – a figure that is growing steadily.

These new smokefree measures mean more Victorians will be free from the dangers of second hand smoke on their daily journey to work.

They also have the added bonus of supporting smokers to quit and stay smokefree for good.

VicHealth supports the Victorian Government in its efforts to continue to decrease the smoking rate.

*Jerril Rechter, CEO  
Victorian Health Promotion Foundation*

### Mental health mentors the best

LAST week on World Mental Health Day and during mental health week I was pleased to join with the St Vincent de Paul Society, Compeer staff, companions, volunteers and friends of the Compeer program to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the very successful Compeer program in Victoria, which the Society supports through ongoing funding.

Compeer is a unique one to one volunteer program that engages volunteers in friendship with a companion who experiences mental health issues, to help combat loneliness for people.

Founded in the USA in 1972, the St Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria

established the program in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne in 2003 and in Bendigo in 2007.

In its ten years of operation, 118 people with a mental illness or companions have been matched with volunteers.

The program recruits, screens and matches volunteers with their companions

It has been proven that as a compliment to traditional therapy a Compeer friendship can make a substantial improvement in a participant's self-worth.

The goals of the program are to assist individuals with mental illness with their recovery through supportive friendships and community connections

To help combat the stigma associated with mental illness by engaging community members in relationships with people who have a psychiatric disability

Consumers or companions are generally in the recovery stage of their illness and are referred to Compeer by a health professional who generally actively involved in their client's treatment.

Congratulations to the Compeer volunteers, to the companions, to Sandra Attwell, co-ordinator of the Bendigo program and to St Vincent de Paul Society, for supporting this successful mental health support program.

*Maree Edwards  
Member for Bendigo West*